

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

October 8, 2004

The Week Ahead

Monday, October 11

Commissioner Miller will attend the EPSD&T Steering Committee meeting and the Children's Cabinet meeting at the Capitol.

Staff Contact: Andrea Turner, andrea.turner@state.tn.us

Tuesday, October 12

The Commissioner will facilitate Leadership and Child Welfare Training in Lexington, Tennessee.

Staff Contact: Lane Simpson, lane.simpson@state.tn.us

Thursday, October 14

Commissioner Miller will facilitate Leadership and Child Welfare Training in Knoxville.

Staff Contact: Lane Simpson, lane.simpson@state.tn.us

Tennessee's Juvenile Justice System: Some Things to Think About

Submitted by Ken Stevenson, Executive Director of Juvenile Justice

In August 2003, the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth released a research study concerning the extent and causes of disproportionate minority confinement (DMC) of youth in seven Tennessee counties: Shelby, Davidson, Knox, Madison, Hamilton, Blount and Washington. The research project was both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

The following findings were made:

- An African-American youth was more likely to be confined if his/her family was unemployed.
- If family members were employed the likelihood of confinement was reduced.
- If the family of a minority youth was living in poverty, the youth was more likely to experience commitment to DCS for delinquency and transfer to adult court (in some counties, 100 percent of the juveniles committed for delinquency came from families that were either receiving public assistance or qualified as indigent for purposes of legal representation).
- If a minority youth was not in school and the family lacked formal education, the youth was more likely to experience confinement.
- Family members being enrolled in school or having a higher level of education reduced the likelihood of a minority youth being placed in confinement.
- Minority youth from single-parent homes, especially where the mother was the only parent present, were more likely to experience a commitment to DCS custody or transfer to adult court.
- More traditional homes with two parents decreased the likelihood that a minority youth would be confined.

- The quantitative research found that race plays a significant part in the referral and intake process and that race has a significant correlation to adjudication, with disposition generally and with detention/incarceration specifically. Qualitative research provided that race did not appear to have any significant correlation with the decisions of the juvenile courts to detain juveniles pretrial, commit juveniles to DCS custody or transfer juveniles to adult court.
- Stagnated socialization (e.g., lack of participation in school activities, sports, etc.) resulted in an increase of the likelihood of confinement.
- Cultural/racial diversity was not maintained in judicial selection, however anecdotally, it seemed that greater diversity was maintained in the selection of Juvenile Court referees.

The research is clear that the issues outlined above have an impact on the experience of minority youth and families that come into contact with the juvenile justice system. However, I'd like to ask you to think about these issues as they relate to all youth that come into contact with the juvenile justice system. Do you think these findings have some relationship to your work in the field? Think about your work with youth and their families and whether or not these findings have implications for the way you go about your casework and how you spend your time and energy. Is the goal of increasing community safety best served by monitoring behavior and reporting violations or by engaging in good social work practice and helping youth and families address the issues they face each day?

It appears to me that the research findings support the notion that our work has to be family focused not child focused. Our JJ youth experience the results of a lack of employment or underemployment, poverty, lack of education, etc., in the context of their family. How many times have I heard someone in the juvenile justice field say, "We work with the kids and then send them right back to the same environment they came from!" Why do we do that? Isn't it time we began to think about families and focus our energy on the kids in the context of a family? We don't have to send them back to the same environment. Let's spend time and energy to engage the family.

If we truly engage a family, we can approach our work with a focus on family strengths. We haven't been inclined to approach our youth and their families as having strengths. We've spent our time focusing on those things that were broken, on shortcomings and weaknesses. I challenge you to expand your definition of family. Look beyond the obvious scenario of mother, father, and siblings. Look to the extended family for strengths. Also look for that "family" that may go beyond bloodlines and build on what they have to offer.

Finally, we have to strive to be culturally sensitive and culturally competent. We all brought a lot with us when we began working in the field of child welfare or juvenile justice. Some of what we brought was good and some is baggage that burdens us down and may at times cloud our judgment in particular situations. Each day, ask yourself if any of your baggage is getting in the way of the best interest of any of the youth on your caseload.

I'm convinced that if we use family-focused, strengths-based, culturally sensitive principals to guide our work, we will make a positive difference in the lives of children, youth and families.

If you are interested in taking a look at the entire report please go to the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Web site at www.tennessee.gov/tccy.

CORE Leadership

**The following are minutes from the CORE Leadership Meeting that occurred on October 5, 2004.*

- Commissioner Miller opened the meeting by reminding the CORE Leadership Team of the guiding work of this agency. The foci under this work include Safety, Permanency, Well-being,

and Resources. In addition, she reminded the group that the themes that should drive this work include family focus, strength based and cultural sensitivity.

- Review of Chapter 11 of Path to Excellence
 - 11-308 – We need to call on MHDD to assist in establishing the services required by this section
 - 11-309 – It is important for us to help shore up the CPIT teams because they are vitally important to the work we do. Some counties have very active CPITs and some do not. Steve Hornsby will review the statutes and regulatory authority establishing the CPIT teams and will determine what we can do to give them teeth. One suggestion is for the Department to request time on the District Attorney's Conference agenda to discuss this issue as the DA in the region controls the CPIT team. Commissioner Miller will draft a letter of support. Additionally Judy Cole and Beth Kasch will talk with Bonnie Beneke to determine any further suggestions to assist in this matter.
- Smith County Redux – The CORE Leadership Team held a discussion concerning the recent events in the Smith County case. Questions that arose are:
 - What can we do to fix the breakdowns?
 - Where do we go as an agency?
 - What can we do to give the supervisors the support they need to do their jobs?
- Elizabeth Black reviewed her assessment of the model that we need to be moving toward in providing services to our children and families and summed the process up as follows: We need three pools of workers and need to assess the caseloads of the workers in the first two pools:
 - The front end worker who possesses a strong understanding of safety and risk assessment.
 - The worker that engages the family and works toward goal-oriented case management.
 - Support from adoption and other specialists.
- Commissioner Miller reviewed the “Ladder of Inference” with the group. This concept is about the process of jumping to conclusions based upon limited information. Commissioner warned that there is a huge difference between advocacy and inquiry. Advocacy is not about data, but rather about taking your opinion and forming action without the entire story. Advocacy does not take into account all aspects of an issue nor does it consider the unintended consequences of action. There is no harm in practicing advocacy, however situations can be greatly improved when there is a temperance of advocacy with inquiry. In order to operate effectively, an organization has to look at the big picture and inform all actions with data and discernment.

Throughout the week, Commissioner wants all of CORE leadership to identify instances where someone runs up the ladder of inference.

- DCS/TennCare Interagency Agreement

DCS is an MCCO providing BHO services through contracts with providers. We have to abide by three basic principles when assessing services: 1) Eligibility, 2) EPSD&T, and 3) John B./Grier. DCS has to do a number of things for our clients such as assessing the adequacy of services provided, developing CQI, monitoring seclusion and restraints, and regular reporting, all as a result of the interagency agreement. A lot of the emphasis is on at risk children and targeted case management.

TennCare has to respond to inquiries within 30 days, collaborate with DCS in improving policy and procedure, review all billing and talk with the feds on our behalf.

Anytime DCS does not uphold our end of the bargain, we can be charged liquidated damages.

- **Provider Monitoring**
Every CSA had a PAR review last year; additionally one-third of the CSAs had a comptroller audit. The findings were less than positive. These agencies currently have 169 contracts with 77 agencies for residential placements. We have to go beyond contract monitoring and begin monitoring the individual performance of providers. We also have to look at incident reporting in conjunction with contract monitoring. We will get to the point where CORE leadership will make the first cuts on the contracts based upon performance and allow the Regions to make selections from those approved lists.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Submitted by Daryl Chansuthus, Director of CQI

CQI In Action

On Tuesday, October 12, 2004, Lynn Usher and Terri Ali, child welfare consultants and Family to Family champions, will be working with a group of DCS staff from Central Office and the Regions on utilizing data to improve performance.

CQI Champions

A truly great meeting with TennCare Consumer Advocates and a follow-up effort by the advocates to identify regional DCS staff and partners who go above and beyond has already yielded two names from the Northwest region: Janie Alexander, TennCare Representative, and Amy Rogers, SAT Coordinator. Our thanks to Angie Amonett, TennCare Consumer Advocate, for her efforts to identify these "CQI Champions" and for spreading the word so that TennCare Representatives and SAT Coordinators from other regions who may not yet have a strong collaborative relationship with their TennCare Consumer Advocate can contact Janie or Amy for advice.

CQI News

Comments on the draft CQI manual are slowly coming in. Thanks to all those who have taken the time to provide feedback! A final version will be prepared and distributed following the first phone conference of CQI regional point persons, which will occur in late October or early November.

An instrument that will be used to introduce peer review statewide is being tested in Davidson region this week with the help of the Davidson CQI team. If all goes well, the instrument will be piloted in at least one region in November. If you are interested in being a pilot region or in finding out more about this opportunity, please email Linda Fenderson-Doss.

Remember, if you have any CQI news you'd like to share, please send an email to Daryl.Chansuthus@state.tn.us. We'd love to celebrate your successes here as well as share your lessons learned. If there are particular members of your staff whose improvement efforts you would like recognize here, please e-mail now!

CQI Barrier Busters

What does your CPS backlog look like? Have you checked the number of your overdues lately? If you haven't, why don't you have a look? The number is on the rise again statewide! Do you have ideas for the appropriate, speedy closing CPS overdues that you'd like to share? Do you have ideas for keeping overdues down to a minimum (or, better yet, for eliminating them entirely)? If so, send them in today! Do you have ideas about what the barriers are that you'd like to share? Send them in today!

CQI Thoughts

One of our goals in the Path to Excellence is to become a “learning organization.” What is a learning organization? According to Peter Senge, a “Learning Organization” is one in which people at all levels, individually and collectively, are continually increasing their capacity to produce results they really care about (Senge, 1990).

Why should DCS become a learning organization? The level of performance and improvement needed today requires learning, lots of learning. In child welfare, there is no clear path to success, no clear path to follow—but the results of failure can be tragic. Continuous learning, then, to improve performance and prevent tragedy is critical for us.

What's in it for DCS staff? **Learning to do** is enormously rewarding and personally satisfying. A Child and Family Team Meeting, for example, that is facilitated by a highly skilled staff member who succeeds in engaging stakeholders in the planning process presents the possibility of achieving extraordinary performance together with satisfaction and fulfillment for each of the individuals involved.

So how do we become a learning organization? Personal mastery is what Peter Senge describes as one of the core disciplines needed to build a learning organization. Personal mastery applies to individual learning, and Senge says that organizations cannot learn until their members begin to learn. Personal Mastery has two components. First, one must define what one is trying to achieve (a goal). Second, one must have a true measure of how close one is to the goal. (Senge, 1990)

The gap that exists between where one is currently functioning and where one wants to be is referred to as ‘creative tension.’ Senge illustrates this with the image of a rubber band pulled between two hands. The hand on the top represents where one wants to be and the hand on the bottom represents where one currently is. The tension on the rubber band as it is pulled between the two hands is what gives the creative drive. Creativity results when one is so unsatisfied with the current situation that one is driven to change it. (Senge, 1990) Another aspect of personal mastery is that one has a clear concept of current reality. Emphasis is placed on the word ‘clear’ here. One must be able to see reality as it truly is without biases or misconceptions. If one has an accurate view of reality, one will see constraints that are present. The creative individual knows that life involves working within constraints and will not waver in trying to achieve the vision. Creativity may involve using the constraints to one's advantage. (Senge, 1990)

Handy has a similar concept in his [‘wheel of learning.’](#) The wheel consists of four quadrants: questions, ideas, tests, and reflection. The metaphor of the wheel makes one think of something moving. What keeps the wheel moving is:

- Subsidiarity: Giving away power to those closest to the action,
- Clubs and Congresses: Places and opportunities for meeting and talking,
- Horizontal Fast-Tracks: Horizontal Career-Tracks that rotate people through a variety of different jobs in the new, flattened organization,
- Self-enlightenment: Individual responsibility for his own learning,
- Incidental Learning: Treat every incident as a case study from which learning can occur.
- The driver of the wheel should be the leader of the organization who sets the example for others to follow. (Handy, 1995.)

Individuals who practice personal mastery experience other changes in their thinking. They learn to use both reason and intuition to create. They become systems thinkers who see the interconnectedness of everything around them and, as a result, they feel more connected to the whole. It is exactly this type of individual that one needs at every level of an organization for the organization to learn. (Senge, 1990) Traditional managers have always thought that they had to have all the answers for their organization. The managers of the learning organization know that their staff has the answers.

The job of the manager in the learning organization is to be the teacher or coach who helps unleash the creative energy in each individual. Organizations learn through the synergy of the individual learners. (Senge, "The Leader's New Work," 1990)

Andrea Walks for Tennessee's Children



The Department of Children's Services is being well represented among hundreds who are participating in Andrea Walks!

Kay Montgomery, of the Inspector General's office, shared her experience as a participant in the Walk.

Participating in this walk was a great experience. Prior to the walk, Andrea Conte reminded everyone of the staggering statistics of child abuse in Tennessee and what we could do to intervene in the cycle. Every mile walked represented 10 children receiving services from child advocacy centers. She reminded everyone this was not a race, but a team effort targeting the needs of abused children and showing support for child advocacy centers. The community support was awesome. People stood on porches and the side of the road waving and cheering us on. Children of all ages greeted us and presented Ms. Conte with money collected in their coin drives at school. One little boy approached Ms. Conte and asked if it was too late to give something. When she replied that it was never too late, he cleaned out his pockets and personally handed her eight cents, which was all the money he had. He told her he wanted to help children from being hurt. Other school children released balloons when we passed their school. College students joined in the walk and presented checks from student organizations to Ms. Conte. It was truly worth the effort to walk arm to arm with others supporting the First Lady's initiative to raise awareness for child abuse victims and funding for the state's child advocacy centers.

Other DCS employees who have participated include Jackson office employees **Ayana Chism, Gail Rice, Debra Richardson, Doretha Brice, and Yalunda McClatchen**. Also participating were **Veronica Humphreys** and **Betsy Little**, who completed the entire 12 miles and according to them, have the blisters to prove it!

Have you walked with First Lady Andrea Conte? If so, we want to know about it! Please e-mail andrea.turner@state.tn.us with details.

Bulletin Board

Submitted by Kathy Bell, Superintendent of Woodland Hills YDC

The Juvenile Justice staff in the Davidson County Regional office sponsored a training session and picnic on Friday, October 1, 2004. Woodland Hills Youth Development Center employees along with others from the department were invited to participate. All of the counseling staff and some security staff attended the event. The training was excellent and the food was good. The best part was the fellowship that took place that day. I want to thank Team Coordinator Mike Wiley and Team Leader Anita Crutcher for including us on the special activity. I am sure that this is only the beginning of regional and youth center staff sharing and participating together.



The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

- Marcel Proust

It takes a deep commitment to change and an even deeper commitment to grow.

- Ralph Ellison

Before you run, check to see if the bulldog has teeth.

- Les Brown
